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## Ulster County creates environment department

By Robert M. Miraldi , Freeman staff

KINGSTON - The Ulster County Legislature on Wednesday created a new Department of the Environment, culminating an effort over several months effort to coordinate the county's environmental services and upgrade its environmental protection initiatives.

The department will begin operations in 2008. A department coordinator, at a salary yet to be determined, will be appointed by the Legislature until the new county executive takes office in January 2009.

"What we did was bring forward a coordination-based unit that does a perfect balancing act of environmental stewardship and financial accountability," said County Administrator Michael Hein. "This is one of those wonderful opportunities that happens in government sometimes when you get to deliver much better service for less money. That's extremely exciting."

The department will coordinate Ulster County's environmental initiatives such as storm water management, "green" building initiatives and minimizing the county's "carbon footprint."

"Ulster County has taken great steps in making environmental protection a top priority," committee co-chairman Brian Shapiro, D-Woodstock, said in a press release. "By establishing a fully independent Department of the Environment, we will continue to lead in this field, and set a great example for other counties in New York state to follow."

"This will benefit the people of Ulster County for generations to come," said Rosendale Democrat Alan Lomita, who co-chaired the committee with Shapiro.

If the department has a primary agenda, it would seem to be an effort to increase efficiency by coordinating environmental services. At present, seven different departments handle environmental issues.

The Department of the Environment will coordinate the following offices: Information Services, Health, Public Works, Soil and Water, Planning, Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Environmental Management Council.

The department, which will consist of a coordinator, deputy coordinator and administrative aide, will report to the county administrator, who in turn reports to the Legislature.

The Environmental Management Council will essentially act as a check of the department, periodically reviewing operations. The council will use the department's annual list of goals and strategies, formulated at the beginning of every year, to make sure the department is achieving what it set out to do.

The annual list of goals will be planned in conjunction with other county departments and create a budget tied directly to that plan. The department's goals are subject to change to accommodate input from entities such as the Global Warming Advisory Committee, the Recycling Oversight Committee, and others charged with environmental oversight responsibilities.

One innovative creation of the department will be an environmental database that will provide an extensive environmental library for intermunicipal cooperation, officials said.

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